News release

9 October 2007

A Healthy Outlook for COPD patients

The Met Office, world leader in weather and climate prediction, has teamed up with medical experts to develop an award-winning and innovative service, Healthy Outlook™, to improve the health of Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD) patients.

Healthy Outlook® aims to reduce the approximate 100,000 COPD-related hospital admissions in England, leading to a potential national saving of £35 million per winter.

The system is a complete package to help keep people with COPD well during the winter. The service includes an automated telephone service that warns patients when the weather or high levels of respiratory infections could lead to a worsening of symptoms. Through automation the new Healthy Outlook™ service has reduced practice workload whilst ensuring that people with COPD are alerted at the right time. Trials in Cornwall during Winter 2006/7 showed that the service helped reduce hospital admissions by up to 52% when compared with the previous year.

Patients said that it helped them better manage their condition, with 9 out of 10 patients saying that they thought the automated telephone calls were helpful. One patient who used the system said: "The calls are very helpful and enable me to get prepared for worsening weather. It's really reassuring to have these calls".

This winter the service is being extended to cover up to 5,000 people in Cornwall and the Met Office is in the process of offering the service to other primary care organisations across the UK.

Healthy Outlook™ was awarded the IDC EMEA 2007 Award for ICT Innovation last month at the Information and Communication Technology Forum in Berlin.

Notes

- The Met Office has worked in partnership with Medixine, a Finnish e-health solution provider, who provided the IT infrastructure.
- In the previous manual service, only about 10% of the calls conducted by nurses reached patients. With the new automated system, 85% of the patients were reached without taking time away from nurses dealing with patient care.
- IDC EMEA is the premier global provider of market intelligence, advisory services, and events for the information technology, telecommunications, and consumer technology markets across Europe, the Middle East and Africa.
- Healthy Outlook™ has also been shortlisted for the Health Service Journal Awards 2007 as part of the Improving Care with E-Technology category. The awards have seen a record number of entries this year and so this is a fantastic achievement. Winners will be announced on 19 November.

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more about the COPD forecast alert service

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